Commission on High School Graduation Achievement and Success Meeting
Fourth Meeting – November 20, 2012
10:00 am
Chicago: JRTC 14th Floor – Illinois State Board of Education
Springfield: 100 N. First Street – Illinois State Board of Education

Minutes

Springfield: Lynn Haeffele, Rhonda Jenkins, Al Llorens, Jeffrey Mays, Candace Mueller, Diane Rutledge, Julie Wollerman

Chicago: Elaine Allensworth, Miguel del Valle, Stacy Davis-Gates, Keisha Davis-Johnson, Brianna Johnson, Elizabeth Kirby, Bill Leavy, Rich Lesniak, Lazaro Lopez, Mark McDonald, Jane Russell, Cathy Schaevel, Julie Smith, Sheila Venson, Leslie Ward, Jack Wuest, Melissa Mitchell

Phone: Dr. Robert Balfanz, Andrea Brown, Rep. Linda Chapa LaVia, Sen. Kimberly Lightford, Dr. Vanessa Kinder

I. **Welcome**
   a. Co-Chair Miguel del Valle welcomed participants and led introductions.
II. **Review of Minutes**
   a. The prior meeting's minutes were approved unanimously.
III. **Opening Remarks:**
   a. Miguel del Valle: We know that there are effective practices out there. There's documentation and research that indicates certain practices would make a big difference yet we haven't institutionalized them across the board. As we think about the recommendations, don't hesitate to throw out a new idea but at the same time think about how we can get our system of public education to do some things that we know need to get done. Think about strategies we can put into place to see that those things happen. We're not looking for new ideas; there's nothing new under the sun as they say. The challenge remains: how can we get these practices into place? Of course the elephant in the room is resources and that will continue to be a challenge. So as you think about recommendations I don't want the lack of resources to be used as an excuse for not getting things done. However, I also acknowledge that we may be operating with one hand tied behind our back in trying to make things happen for kids at the district level if we don't have adequate resources. Regional offices for example don't have the adequate staffing levels to be effective on issues like chronic truancy.
   b. Elaine Allensworth: Something to consider is how we can make it easy for schools to do things that will help kids – things that will help them stay in school and reenroll. How can we help schools make sure kids are coming everyday and address the issues of truancy?
   c. Julie Smith: I think we should clarify whether or not you want this commission to identify what resources might be needed or whether you would like it to approach it by recommending specific programs and someone else would make a determination of what it might cost.
   d. Senator Lightford: I ditto so much of what Mr. Del Valle said. I know even in times when resources were not scarce we were still dealing with the same issues of implementation and follow through. We come up with grand ideas all the time but they fall short in

implementation. I think what's really important is strategizing. When will the Governor's Office and the State of Illinois take on education as its top priority and make sure that what we're discussing will not be discussed 10 years from now? Senator Del Valle, you've been there, you've done this before and 20 years later you're repeating yourself. It becomes a matter of when will we make this a priority and when will the State make sure that these committees and commissions and task force recommendations are followed through and go in the direction that they should. When will the City of Chicago take on the responsibility of educating our children at a traditional Chicago Public School? Those are the real issues.

e. Representative Chapa LaVia: We need to handle the education monster and you got it right Senator del Valle, but we need a constitutional change because people come and go out of the Mayor's Office, people come and go out of CPS and out of Springfield. We need to enact something that's a constant, which can be checked every 2 or 4 years for data and research that it's working. It has to be outside the four walls of education, we have a whole community in Chicago that can help our children succeed but we never ask them, whether it's the Chicago Housing Authority, whether it's public aid or community groups or teachers' unions or the religious community. This is a discussion that needs to happen across the state, we think pension reform is a big issue but we don't get a grasp on how badly we are doing in educating our children in the State of Illinois. That's the crisis I think we're in and I'm on board with both of my colleagues but the discussion has to be outside that building, it has to be larger than education. It has to include business people and everybody else understanding why educating our children is so important; they're the young professionals. We're educating our children so they have a well paying job and are taxpaying citizens. If we don't do that then we'll continue down the same path where a third of our kids are graduating or 6 out of 10 African American boys don't graduate and 4 out of 10 Hispanic kids don't graduate. In third grade classes we know students are being passed along to fourth grade without reading at grade level. A third of them are reading at a third grade level and that's everywhere in the state. So systematically something has to change, but it has to be incorporated into everything else because the reason our kids are not graduating or aren't in school is because parents don't know or are misinformed. There's a lack of communication and wrap around services for parents once they become pregnant and have a child. Many need someone to hold their hand and show them the possibilities for the future generation. This commission, like every taskforce as you said Senator Lightford, isn't different. And there are resources out there; there are ways to find money. The churches are more than happy to step up if we ask them to help support our mission of educating every child regardless of where they live in the state.

f. Bill Leavy: There's a part of the resource puzzle that's pretty simple. Right now when a kid reaches 17 years of age they are no longer eligible for Title I money. This works against the issue of retention because you work 10 or 11 years with a kid and then when you get them at their most vulnerable – when they're legally able to drop out – we snatch that resource back. A tweak in the federal law that would allow Title I resources to expand until the point of graduation would be a massive help for programs trying to retain at-risk, low income students. It's simple and seems commonsense but we lost $200,000 this year because our kids were no longer eligible for the funding.

    i. Miguel del Valle: My understanding is that IL is granted a waiver and that we'd be able to do something about that because we have the flexibility.

ii. Julie Smith: We do have the flexibility, but I don't know whether the age limit has changed so let me look into that.

IV. Doctor Balfanz's Presentation:

a. Robert Balfanz: Welcome everybody. My goal is to talk briefly about how to solve the dropout crisis and then answer some questions. First, I want to thank you for your work because as you know this is a critical issue. There's no work in the 21st century if you don't have a high school diploma and there's no work to support a family if you don't have a high school diploma and some sort of post secondary training. If we don't provide that to our communities and our children we're essentially cutting them off from participation in the 21st century. The other thing I hope you're aware of is that this is solvable; this problem can be solved collectively. It's not beyond our capacity. I want to begin briefly with a few things we know about this challenge and that'll lead us into the solution.

i. The first good news is that we know kids don't want to drop out of school. The implicit pushback against dropout prevention is that kids don't want to graduate. Their parents don't want them to graduate so what can we do? However, the truth is every student wants to graduate. They all want the chance for a better life and they only drop out when they feel they have no other option, often after long periods of struggle. They regret it almost as soon as they drop out and a lot of times try to come back but that's really very difficult once they drop out of school.

ii. Second, we know a lot about why kids drop out – it's not a mystery. There are four broad buckets.

1. Some kids drop out, always have always will because of **life events**. They get pregnant or arrested or they have to work to support their family. Those issues are always going to be around and the solution is finding ways to deal with that outside of school challenge while still providing them with a path to graduation.
2. There's another group of kids that we call the **fade-outs**. These are kids that almost make it to graduation; they make it to 12th grade but drop out 5 credits or less short of graduation. These kids make the determination that a diploma won't matter with the job they're likely to get and the future they're likely to get. They believe they can get a GED if they need to with the same outcome. Very often these kids regret that decision. This is a group that is ripe for some more career pathways education. They may think that the labor job they'll get is the same with or without that diploma but in 5, 6 years it certainly isn't.
3. The third group of kids is **push-outs**; they're kids that the schools decide are problematic and some actually are. Schools wait until they can apply administrative rule which is often based on reaching a legal drop out age and missing a certain amount of school. They are then actively pushed and purged out as soon as that's possible.
4. Finally, the biggest group of kids is those that are **not succeeding in school**. They're struggling to pass their courses and attend school regularly for a host of reasons. They're essentially not succeeding at school so that they not only don't graduate but won't receive any sort of postsecondary training.

b. The next thing we know is which schools kids drop out from, especially now that we have the new adjusted cohort graduation data. We know it isn't perfect but it's getting better and we can really pinpoint the geography of where we're losing these kids and which subset of schools are working for some kids but not others. We know within those schools who will drop out if we don't do something, because we know that kids are signaling early and often. They're signaling often and early that they are becoming disengaged from school and are struggling. Ironically it's called the **"ABCs:" attendance, behavior, and course performance**. By paying attention to those signals we know which schools kids are dropping out from and who's likely to drop out, which allows for a more targeted effort much earlier and therefore a much higher success rate. The way this all comes together is our **"meta goal:" to get the right intervention to the right kid at the right time**. A scale of intensity is required and we can do that because we know who, where, when, and why, which are the foundational questions to have an effective prevention intervention recovery strategy. We know what we need to do so that every kid graduates and is prepared for postsecondary education. What we also know is that there has to be different approaches for kids with different magnitudes of challenge for which there are a few categories.

- **i.** The first subset of schools is typically in the high poverty areas where there could be literally hundreds of students with off track indicators and those schools need fundamental whole school transformation. We can't individually intervene our way out of the problem when we have hundreds of kids that are falling off track.
- **ii.** There's a second set of schools (and I think this is the largest in Illinois) that have graduation rates between 60-75%. These are schools that are working for some kids, but not all kids. A strong early warning intervention system is needed for these kids where they're being monitored early and there's intervention on the scale that's needed. We have evidence based intervention for behavioral issues. We intervene when they fail a test not the course. Oftentimes it's a team based approach that fundamentally involves the teachers at the school. At this magnitude we can't give it to a counselor or a graduation coach – we really need to get teachers involved to implement this early warning intervention. The problem is too large for a few adults to deal with it.
- **iii.** Lastly, there's a third subset of schools that have graduation rates above 75% but within these schools there's a pocket of kids for which school isn't working. It may be 30 or 20 in a class that are in trouble but at that level you can have a smaller scale of adults monitoring those kids and really being effective.

c. You really need to match the size of the intervention with the size of the problem. The final thing is broad strategies that can be adopted at a statewide level which we studied in our building a grad nation reports which I recommend you look at on our everyone graduates website. These are 8 different things:

- **i.** First, we need to focus early so that we make sure by 3rd grade kids are reading at grade level. For example, Annie Casey's grade level reading campaign.
- **ii.** We need to measure absenteeism because if we don't then no one knows it's an issue. There's been a recent push to address chronic absenteeism and this was recently highlighted in a Chicago Tribune series which vividly portrays the obstacles kids face and how it is both a big city issue but also one that districts and smaller towns around Illinois face. What we do measure is average daily attendance or how many kids are in the building on any given day but we don't

measure how many kids are regularly missing lots of school. We've done some research that shows 5-7.5 million kids are missing a month of school. The data is clear: absenteeism impacts achievement, it impacts their progression in school, and it impacts their chances of graduating so it's really a big issue that has been under the radar.

iii. We need to do some reinvention in the middle grades because that's where we're losing kids and that's when they make the decision: is schooling for me or is it simply something to be endured? This is a pivotal decision and we need to do some work to make sure kids are having experiences that propel them to make the right decision. They must decide to put forth the effort required to do well in challenging courses when they enter high school.

iv. We need to organize a second shift of adults in the schools that have a lot of off track kids because the teachers and faculty are not enough to deal with all the kids that need what we call 'success monitoring.' Someone that's constantly checking in on them and asking them, are you in school? Are you getting along with your teacher? Are you getting your work done? We refer to this as 'nagging nurturing.'

v. We have to monitor the transition once kids get to high school because it's a very critical time.

vi. We have to do something about schools with a high percentage of dropouts and fundamentally transform them.

vii. We have to build strong pathways to college and careers so that kids can see the pathway and really believe in it. Again these kids are often in high poverty areas; they don't have that lived experience and don't know that doing well in school leads to a better job and a better life.

viii. Finally we know that despite everything we can't be perfect and we need strong drop out second chance efforts.

d. Representative Chapa LaVia: Have you studied changing school hours in a way that's best for the student as opposed to us forcing the system on the student? For example, online courses, coming in at 10AM leaving at 5PM or even weekend hours. Have you studied any of that at all?

i. Robert Balfanz: Where I've seen that done most is in alternative schools, especially for those students that have had life events or need to work to support their families. It builds some flexibility into when they can learn so if they can't meet the standard hours they still have an opportunity. I don't know of any hard evidence one way or the other that says starting the day later is better for adolescents.

ii. Representative Chapa LaVia: I think that for students, especially in those categories you mentioned, we should be catering education to their needs as opposed to what our society thinks education should look like.

iii. Robert Balfanz: Right and I think that a lot of the time people have trouble believing that unless they see it. Where you see that often is with chronic absenteeism when you discover all these external factors that are really driven by intergenerational poverty. For example, we do know that oftentimes older adolescents have to get their younger siblings to school and that makes them late but they don't want to deal with the hassle of being late so they just don't go that day.

iv. Elaine Allensworth: You mentioned parent help and we've been doing studies in the high school and preschool years that show parent help plays a very key role in students coming to school. Thinking about the fact that life events happen to all students and what help they can get around whatever their life event might be is very important.

v. Robert Balfanz: To echo that, one thing that's really been growing are young adolescents having to do adult care. For example, there are single parent households with multi-generational family members such as a great aunt or uncle or a grandparent. The single parent is working and the elder person may have health issues and adolescents are the ones helping with those health issues. From the kid's point of view they're being heroic because that person helped raise them and they're trying to take care of them but on the flipside of things they're missing lots of school. That's where we need to (a) understand what's happening and (b) have the resources to figure out that someone else needs to be giving grandma the diabetes shot not the fifteen year old high school kid.

e. Melissa Mitchell: That begs the question of where you've seen effective strategies around organizing community resources and support in addressing these problems. I don't believe in solutions that are in isolation so everything that you've talked about from my perspective factors into the need for better community resources and support so that the fifteen year old isn't responsible for figuring out what department of Public Health can help his grandma get what she needs. It's the responsibility of the community to ensure that sort of burden is lifted off the fifteen year old. Have you seen practices that highlight that type of collaboration or partnership and move the needle on some of this?

i. Robert Balfanz: Yes, some people point to the Strive effort in Cincinnati as a cradle-to-grave multiagency effort with some success. Another organization that's done it on the narrow issue of absenteeism along the same strategy is in New York City. The mayor brought all of the department heads together and said you need to work collectively on this. So the Department of Public Health has to help them figure out asthma. The Department of Housing has to help in getting homeless kids to school. So I would say there are some emerging, often mayor-led efforts because they have the power to bring agencies together. Some more organic community-based ones are non-profit and public sector agencies coming together around these issues.

f. Al Llorens: I heard you say that identifying the link for future success is important and as a high school teacher for 37 years I think part of my job is sales. When I talk to a student and tell them put this time in and down the line you'll have a reward they look around their household and see people with degrees and high amounts of student loan debt and no jobs. This plays out against a gang that tries to recruit them with immediate money. The sales becomes very difficult so combating that has been a challenge for me and I'm sure I'm not the only one. How would you address that and what are your thoughts on that?

i. Robert Balfanz: It is really about trying to build into students the idea that their education will lead to success which is a hard sell because it's so distant in the future. The link between that is building lived in-school experiences that show effort leads to success they can enjoy. This is a middle school answer, but I also think that there are high school analogies to it: Often the most engaged kids

that you'll find are those that are on the debate team, drama team, and chess team. These are actually high cognitive activities; they're not 'play' and are very intellectual. What they share is that they are often done in a team or group atmosphere and it's a short cycle between performance and reward. So you rehearse for a few weeks and put on a play either it's good or bad. You get applause or you don't. You're in the robotics club, if you don't put enough time into building your robot you'll lose in the first round of a competition. If your debate team doesn't practice it's out. This is about building the sense that if you put work in and work together something good comes from it. This is often not a lived experience they get outside of school in high-poverty environments so we have to think of ways we can foster that in school.

g. Senator Lightford: We have some areas around here that have what we call remedial dual credit. Most dual credit people are taking something ahead of time for their community college. However in these cases the student may be a junior or a senior and they are taking remedial classes such as algebra because they have to take developmental courses. So this remedial approach also helps in that self-confidence of acquiring credit even though that credit won't count towards an associate degree it will save you developmentally plus it'll save the problem of having so many students spend so much time in developmental classes that may not work. I wonder if you've seen any trend in that.

i. Robert Balfanz: I haven't seen a trend but just from what you've told me I think there's probably some good merit to it because again what happens is that kids, especially those that are struggling and have experienced failure before form dysfunctional coping methods that psychologically help them but don't help them cognitively. An easy way to interpret that is a student saying things like: the teacher wasn't very good, it was a dumb test, I didn't really try and that's why I didn't do well but if I need to I can try and I'll be fine. You're basically psychologically protecting yourself because it's a very scary place to be in if you try really hard and still fail. I think we need to offer an incentive that says this can really matter for you, it's not just a test you have to take to keep going but it actually helps you with your future so you should really try. We also know that kids who have to take a lot of developmental courses in community colleges don't really make it.

h. Jeff Mays: On the chronic truancy issues, what's working out there? It seems like there's no stick and it's all carrots. Is there any place that's helping kids get back to school?

i. Robert Balfanz: That's something that's being tested in various models right now. For example in Los Angeles County they were handing out $300 tickets to students and parents which was only counterproductive. The kids knew that if they were going to be late it was better to just stay home so they wouldn't get ticketed. There's other places where that's sort of held out as a last resort when it's discovered that parents are actively keeping kids at home to help out at home or with businesses and in that case that stick works as a threat and a carryout. We do need a combination but they need to be calibrated to the situation. We have to do a lot of information gathering because it may seem like the kid doesn't care but they don't want to tell you the true story which is that they're taking their dad to chemotherapy because they don't have a reason to trust you with that information. We need a range of carrots and sticks depending on the circumstances we find.

1. Jeff Mays: Based on your experience I'd like to see what carrots are most effective and what sticks are most effective. If you have any strategies you could provide us with that would be great.

i. Bill Leavy: I'd like to talk for a little bit about the issue of concentration – those schools that have extremely high dropout rates. In Chicago, historically that's been many of the neighborhood schools with dropout rates of over 50%. I think part of our concern is do no harm. We seem to have policies that concentrate on the at-risk, the poorest and the racial minorities. Chicago neighborhood schools have been going to hell for a long time as CPS works to create more selective schools that take out the higher performing students in the neighborhood schools and leave in the underperforming students at schools like Crane, Marshall and Clemente. This creates an energy of failure in the building and the isolation of underperforming kids is a serious problem. I hate to say that these buildings are becoming drop out factories because it's not the fault of administrators that those buildings are being challenged beyond their reasonable capacity. To support this let me say that in Chicago we have massive differences between race and gender in completion rates. Right now the high performance testing model business policies force administrators to play hot potatoes with their kids. They want to get them out of their building before that PSAE test comes and we have stories of it happening at Whitney Young where administrators want those lower performing kids out of their buildings to push up their test scores. The pressure on administrators to push up test scores tends to make them marginalize the lower performing students. That's the dynamic in the system which work against high needs youth and we have to get the system to do no harm.

i. Robert Balfanz: I don't have any broad disagreement with that given that those schools are socially constructed not to succeed. A fundamental driver is to concentrate the high needs kids in a subset of schools that are not designed to meet that challenge and therefore the results are predictable, like a factory. That's the idea. It's not the school that's doing it intentionally, but the system is set to over concentrate overly needy kids under the funny assumption that all kids are the same. It's based on the amount of pupils and not on the challenges that are in the building. A metaphor I give is that in diving the degree of difficulty matters. If you do a straight dive off the high dive with perfection you don't get many points for it. It's not very hard comparatively speaking but if you do a drop triple back your degree of difficulty is so much higher that you do better. That's why degree of difficulty is something we need to grade schools on and then resource accordingly. Only then can we hold them accountable given that their degree of difficulty has been taken into consideration.

j. Miguel del Valle: In your presentation when you talked about the subset of schools you started out with the high-poverty ones. Those are the ones Bill was talking about and you indicated that what you need in those schools are whole school improvements. Are you talking about turn-around? How would you describe that process?

i. Robert Balfanz: I'm not arguing for a particular brand of whole school reform because I think the jury is still out on that. One can argue that if you just change the people and not the circumstance you won't make a huge difference. What I am arguing for though is transforming that whole school without attaching a specific meaning to that term. I'm just saying that at that stage we can't individually intervene our way out of it. There are just too many kids and the school is often dysfunctional and not designed to meet those needs. Even if we

do individual intervention in a dysfunctional environment a lot of our efforts get washed out.

k. Diane Rutledge: I really like your list and the guidance it provides. Can you speak to what it means in terms of state policy?

i. Robert Balfanz: Yes, something that really needs to be done is a policy review and a policy audit. This is often the easiest thing when money is tight. There are often things that are on the state books, or things people believe are on the state books but really aren't, or things that were put on there in the past which made sense at the time but are now counter-productive. For example: suspensions for kids that are chronically absent. That is on the books in a surprising number of districts and states because there's this idea that the kid needs to be sanctioned for goofing off and not coming to school which makes no sense when you think about it. Any time we're trying to approve one of the "ABCs" (attendance, behavior, course performance) by sanctioning a student on another one we're not going in the right direction. Another one is that if you miss 10 days of school you have to fail. Again schools are trying to be tough but a kid figures if they miss 10 days then they shouldn't come at all because they'll have to repeat the course anyways. Just making sure there aren't counterproductive things on the books is an important step. Then you need things like to measure chronic absenteeism, which can be state policy. Another idea is holding schools and districts accountable for providing students with pathways to success whether it be community college, career technical training or college. Their sequence must be a clear pathway that kids can understand.

ii. Miguel del Valle: In Illinois we do keep track of chronic absenteeism and we've been doing it for a long time. We keep track of it but I don't know what we do about it.

iii. Robert Balfanz: How available is it at the school level? Can schools find out what students missed 10% of school?

1. Members noted that schools can find out that information
2. Elaine Allensworth: Right but how many schools have strategies around it?

iv. Jack Wuest: Funding has gone down in TAEOP grants by 33% to address some of these truancy issues and it's gone down 67% for regional safe schools program in the last 3 years.

l. Bill Leavy: Tell us what you've learned about the experiences of the achievement academies in Chicago.

i. Robert Balfanz: What's happened with the achievement academies is that they began with a robust design that's been chipped away at year after year because of budget cuts. For example, on the original design they reduced class size to 20 or fewer. They assigned a student advocate who might have 120 kids and whose job was basically to track students and help them solve their problems. There was a lot of technical assistance and they had professional coaches. I think at the fully supported model there is evidence that they had a significant impact which is moving the graduation rate from 30% to 50%. So it's good but it's still not getting every kid. What that taught me is that even if you have a highly resourced, pretty strong program there's still a subset of kids that need more help or more likely needed it earlier. Preschool really matters but in high poverty areas the intersection between poverty and early adolescence creates a

whole new set of dynamics that are not protected against even if the student is reading at grade level. One thing we took out of it that has led to refinements for the next generation is we recognized that kids who did well still needed a lot of nagging and nurturing and a smaller number needed case management so that you had to solve their external issues for it to work. That's why in creating our next model, starting with a few schools in Chicago we bring in City Year which is a national service organization. It's teams of 17-24 year olds year olds essentially doing urban peace corps. Each of them shepherds 15 kids throughout the day that are in the middle range. They go with them to Math and English classrooms, they make sure they got their work done. If they're not there in the morning they make a phone call to get them, they work out behavioral issues. They are sort of their shepherds for lack of a better word. They focus on each aspect of the ABCs. Then we work with communities and schools to have a case manager deal with the subset of kids who need it and we use our early warning indicators to review how this is all going every two weeks. You have to combine whole school reform with enhanced student support which in part involves more person power and is guided by this early warning data so that as soon as kids are signaling you can intervene. It also allows you to monitor whether the intervention is making a difference and if not you change it and try something else.

ii. Bill Leavy : I think what you're missing with the theoretical model is that those achievement academies were set up in under resourced, underperforming, high-risk buildings. They were in Clemente, they were in Crane, they were in the underperforming high-poverty buildings and you're bringing kids from a bunch of different neighborhoods that are going across gang boundaries and coming into these schools. This creates enormous problems for them as they absorb these kids. Again you're taking a theoretical model that doesn't consider time and space. You didn't have an achievement academy at Whitney Young. That's the problem – you have to put it into the context of time and space.

iii. Elaine Allensworth: There are three stages: the transition spaces within their own schools which were a complete failure. I think 85% of the students dropped out. Then there was the academic prep center which were schools located at other schools. That led to the realization that students in those centers were dropping out because they couldn't get credit. The third iterations of this is the achievement academy where students are still taking the remedial classes, but can also take high school classes so that they won't fall behind in graduating. They're located at the most struggling schools and were serving the most struggling students because they all had test scores that were way below grade level and were over age before they even got there.

iv. Robert Balfanz: One reason why that was such a difficult thing is that those kids were not passing their 8th grade promotion tests and were retained. If we're honest, retention is our go-to strategy for struggling kids but it's incredibly low impact and incredibly high cost. What we're arguing is that we need to move past this retention model to an early warning intervention system so at the first sign of trouble we are moving in with a level of support to redirect them and solve the problem quickly. If we cut down and address these early warning issues we can cut down retention and not create a situation where there's a 16 year old 8th grader. On a state policy level, retention is popular because it's

seen as a politically tough thing that shows we're serious about standards and at the school level it's seen as a free intervention because schools are funded for every pupil. It doesn't matter if the kid is there for the 1st, 2nd, or 3rd time – they get $10,000 no matter what. The way the money flows it's not recognized as a big cost but it's really a tremendous cost.

v. Elaine Allensworth: There are so many costs to retention that people don't realize. If you hold a kid back that means you're holding your lowest achieving student longer which means you have the lowest performing students in the school for more years and that brings down test scores.

vi. Member: I saw firsthand that there's no one that's angrier than a 16 year old 8th grader so there are fiscal costs but there are also costs to that young person. We implement policies that are focused on yanking them back from the brink but not on making sure they don't reach the brink. This shows that on a policy level that we need to direct more resources to schools that are having the most difficulty with student success and engagement. Another piece is a consistent use of data. Does everybody who comes into contact with the students being served know how to direct resources based on the data? Another issue is sustainability, we make these finite or limited investments and then slowly chip away at it until it's a shell of its former self or we expect results within a year or two or even a semester.

m. Miguel del Valle: Does high stakes testing make a bad situation worse when it comes to pushing out kids?

i. Robert Balfanz: All the data we run tells us that course grades are much more predictive than test scores. No one wants to believe that because test scores can't be so easily fixed, you can just give everyone "As" whereas in tests you don't have much of an issue with cheating. However grades give you that overall evaluation of whether a student can succeed at school, whether they can come to school and understand the material and do the work. That's the measure that tells you whether they'll succeed in college or post-secondary training. The tests are important for various reasons, I'm not arguing for no tests but it's debatable whether they're taken too far. I think there's a lot of history indicating that if we start telling teachers their pay is based on test scores they start getting really pissed off at the kid if they aren't doing well. So instead of trying to help the student and figuring out their issues they'd just as soon push them out. This isn't true in all cases, some people have good intentions but under enough pressure you'll find that having an impact.

n. Elaine Allensworth: Thank you Doctor Balfanz, that was excellent. We're now going to move on to our panelists.

V. Panel: Sheila Venson, Bill Leavy, Keisha Davis-Johnson, Brianna Johnson, Lazaro Lopez and Elizabeth Kirby

a. Principal Keisha Davis-Johnson provided background on her school, West Town Academy. She noted the 60% dropout rate in the surrounding community and highlighted some of the ways West Town works to keep students in school and on track, such as having as many teachers as mentors (who connect students with organizations for wraparound services) and promoting in school activities.

b. West Town Academy student Brianna Johnson stated that she wasn't motivated to succeed at her former school (Prosser) because no one pushed her to succeed and that as a result she was unmotivated and her grades slipped. When she learned she was on

the verge of repeating the 10th grade, she transferred to West Town Academy on the advice of a friend. She is now a member of the Student Council and volleyball team and has a 4.0 GPA, which she attributes in large part to the structure and atmosphere at West Town, as well as the personalized support she receives from teachers and staff. She plans to graduate in 2013, attend Alabama State University and study cosmetology.

c. Bill Leavy: Raising the compulsory school age will not solve the substantive issues here. We cannot ignore race and gender when looking at these problems. Additionally, Exit Code 9 needs to be rewritten – it needs to connect re-enrolls but doesn't. Leavy then distributed a handout detailing these and other concerns.

d. Sheila Venson noted that dropouts are now increasingly being counted as transfers. She then gave background on her school, Youth Connections Charter School, presented data on the increasing number of special education students who are being pushed out of schools. She attributed much of this to the pressure of high-stakes testing.

e. Lazaro Lopez provided background on his efforts at Wheeling High School, including its 90% graduation rate in the face of numerous challenges. Lopez highlighted numerous keys to Wheeling's success:

- **i.** Making high school relevant for all students on an individual, personalized level
- **ii.** The importance of increased and innovative academic offerings (such as blended schedules).
- **iii.** Providing and/or connecting students with overlapping socio-emotional support. Much of this has come through the use of interns and other low/no cost partnerships.
- **iv.** Partnering with feeder k-8 schools to identify and correct problems early on.
- **v.** Focusing on strengths of the student communities (STEM, in the case of Wheeling).
- **vi.** "Each student has to be engaged personally. We've moved from educating the masses to educating individual."
- **vii.** Lopez encouraged the State to continue supporting the Pathways initiative. He also wondered why there is a difference between school districts in terms of number of credits needed to graduate.

f. Elizabeth Kirby provided background on her current work as a District Chief for CPS and her past work with on-track measures and strategies at Kenwood Academy High School. She stated that the on-track model changed the way high school considered their role, making them more attuned to the needs of students. The district held schools accountable for really knowing their students. The program also brought increased and improved mentoring, tutoring, before/afterschool homework help and various tracking methods.

- **i.** Stacy Davis-Gates noted that such a level of intentionality needs to be found at every level of the system.
- **ii.** Bill Leavy: What about high school closings? It's essentially just African-American schools in Chicago.
    1. Elizabeth Kirby: CPS looks at more implications of closings that it perhaps did in the past. Additionally, the population is simply shrinking in many neighborhoods like Englewood.
- **iii.** Elaine Allensworth: What can the State do?
    1. Bill Leavy: State Legislators need to get out into the schools and neighborhoods.

2. Elizabeth Kirby: Add an on-track metric, assist in providing trend data to schools and districts.
3. Stacy Davis-Gates: When we think about credit recovery, the idea of "seat time" is an impediment.

iv. Mark McDonald: What did you do to ID students in need?

1. Elizabeth Kirby: We used reports from their 8th grade schools as well as having early meetings with teachers.

g. Rich Lesniak: What do you find works for attendance improvements?

i. Lazaro Lopez: You need to be creative. I rely on interns and other partnerships.

ii. Keisha Davis-Johnson: You need to make students have intrinsic connections to school and learning.

iii. Members mentioned the need for safety, noting that it is an issue beyond cities.

VI. Adjourn